

Advancing from wary reform to revolution

Written by Lee Min-yung 李敏勇

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The political situation in Taiwan is heading toward a time of crucial change. Although the nation continues to be called the Republic of China (ROC) domestically, the overwhelming consensus is that its name is Taiwan, not the ROC. Given the argument that the “status quo” has to be maintained, the road to reform consists of cautious advances toward national reconstruction. With this awareness, Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) presidential candidate Tsai Ing-wen’s (蔡英文) influence is growing as she leads the DPP toward ever-widening political support.

President Ma Ying-jeou’s (馬英九) greatest contribution during his two-term presidency has been the creation of a willingness among Taiwanese, regardless of ethnic background, to abandon the colonial party-state system. The crucial force behind this change has been the universal awakening among the younger generation.

This is a new political setting that has formed as a result of the awakening among under-30-year-olds born after 1987, when the Martial Law era ended. The difference between the younger generation and older generations — who were suppressed and educated into developing a slave mentality during the Martial Law era — is that today’s young people are looking for ways to survive and make a living amid all this tragedy and humiliation.

Freedom has lifted the constraints on the several generations of Taiwanese who were shackled by martial law. During this era, people from different ethnic groups abandoned politics in pursuit of their own self-interests as they followed their parents’ advice to “listen and remain silent,” and concentrated on making money or serving the party-state system of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) government, the military, the civil service or public schools, turning them into a force blocking reform. However, this system was impossible to maintain.

It is the KMT itself that has broken down as Ma’s ugly side caused the colonial party-state system to collapse. As soon as the power of reform pushed against the rotten system, it crumbled. In the end, the national myth, which was built upon layers of lies, could not withstand the onslaught from the truth. Young Taiwanese from diverse ethnic backgrounds now all know, and are not afraid to point out, that the king is naked.

Throughout the Martial Law era, the KMT used the ROC and the rhetoric about retaking China to control Taiwanese and drive them to oppose the People’s Republic of China (PRC), the state

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that drove the KMT out.

After abolishing martial law, and especially after democratization, the party nurtured the pipe dream that it would be able to count on the PRC to help it continue to control Taiwan.

The only reasoning behind its opposition to, or support of, the Chinese Communist Party has always been the desire to maintain its own power. After all those years of having been misled and deceived, Taiwanese have now seen through the ruse, and the younger generation, following their own vision, has exposed the lie.

The younger generation will continue to grow, and they will direct the political vision and the nation's future. In doing so, they will put an end to the empty remnant of China that has hidden in Taiwan since Oct. 1, 1949, and they will put an end to the absurd otherness of the state.

These are crucial changes that need to be made. Next year's presidential and legislative elections will push the cautiously advancing reform toward a revolutionary vision.

Lee Min-yung is a poet.

Translated by Perry Svensson

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